United Nations E/CN.9/2004/NGO/3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 February 2004

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development
Thirty-seventh session
22-26 March 2004
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up actions to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

Statement submitted by Interact Worldwide (formerly Population Concern), International Family Health and Italian Association for Women in Development, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.9/2004/1.

04-24823 (E) 010304

1 As non-governmental organizations, we welcome the Report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the progress made in achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (E/CN.9/2004/3), and wish to take this opportunity to confirm our support for the further implementation of the Programme of Action during the next ten years.

2 Chapter III: 'Reproductive rights and reproductive health' reflects the emphasis that has been given during the past decade to issues around quality of care and the importance of meeting the unmet need for contraception. It does not, however, truly reflect the progress that has been made by countries in moving towards respecting the reproductive rights of their citizens. It should be noted, for example, that in addition to laws and policies that have been introduced by some Governments, during the past decade the monitoring committees on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child have all adopted General Comments or General Recommendations on aspects of the Right to Health, including the Right as it affects the reproductive health of women and adolescents. These documents all provide guidance to Governments as well as members of the monitoring committees on implementing sexual and reproductive rights.

Reproductive rights mean ensuring that everyone, especially women and young people are treated with respect, confidentiality and privacy, and are able to give free and informed consent to any treatment and services. A rights-based approach also obliges Governments to move towards ensuring access to a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services. This obligation re-enforces the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health services in measures for health sector reform and Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes. It is also a pre-requisite if the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those on poverty eradication, education gender equality, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, are to be achieved.

We therefore urge all Governments to give greater priority to promoting the implementation of sexual and reproductive rights as an integral part of the follow-up to the Programme of Action during the next decade.

3 While the report of the Secretary-General recognises the importance of strengthening partnerships with non-governmental organizations and civil society in the future, the contribution that they have made particularly in the areas of 'Reproductive rights and reproductive health' and 'Health and mortality' is not fully reflected. One of the characteristics of the past decade has been the shortfall in financial and human resources, which has had a negative effect on the provision of reproductive health services. This has been at a time when the demands have been greatest not only because of commitments to implement the Programme of Action, but also because of the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors have worked alongside governments in providing increased access to quality reproductive health information and services in areas such as contraception, particularly condoms; antenatal, post-natal and essential obstetric care; safe abortion services; treatment for the

complications of unsafe abortion; prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections; and information and services targeted at young people and vulnerable groups including refugees and migrants.

Non-governmental organizations have also been involved in the training programmes necessary to improve the capacity of health personnel and to assist them in implementing the Programme of Action. They have also worked with communities and groups to increase their awareness of reproductive rights and reproductive health and have been strong advocates at national and international levels for the Programme of Action. Most recently they have strongly promoted the need for improved reproductive health for all people if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved by 2015.

We believe that NGOs and other civil society actors will continue to be essential partners for the further implementation of the Programme of Action at the community, national and international levels.